

Head to Head (If You Can Hear Me) by GallifreyGod

Series: [Skin to Skin](#) [4]

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst, Author Is Crying, Domestic, Drama, F/M, Fluff, Romance, Tragedy

Language: English

Characters: Calvin Powell, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Original Child Character(s), Original Male Character(s), Phil Callahan, Will Byers

Relationships: Joyce Byers & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper

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Summary:

Joyce comes head to head with her worst fears.

part four of skin to skin

Head to Head (If You Can Hear Me)

Author's Note:

song theme for this fic is ruskin's death by sleeping at last

"And if you can hear me, I love you."

It was a fight. One of their rare but silly little arguments that left them both hot-headed and frustrated. Joyce couldn't remember what the fight was even about, all she knew was that Hopper stormed off to do what he usually did when he was pissed - drive around. Since he had quit drinking when Molly was born, he had been working on ways to channel his anger safely and driving seemed to be the winner. He'd cruise around for 15 minutes and come back with a whole new attitude.

Joyce had promised herself that when she and Hopper got together that she wouldn't allow them to fight around the kids like her and Lonnie. Hopper respected and agreed, so the back steps were usually where opinions aired.

It wasn't a serious fight, just a small argument but it always stung the same way. At least she knew Hopper would come back, Lonnie would take days to return and he usually smelled like a brewery and Astroglide when he finally did. So each time Hopper stormed off, Joyce just kept going about her day and expected him back for dinner. And he always was.

That was the only thing that was different this time. Even when the rare fights occurred, he always came back fifteen minutes later. Not a second earlier nor a second later. Joyce could feel guilt starting to swell in the bottom of her stomach when she set the dinner plates down at the table. Where was he? The kids were starting to get suspicious and she couldn't stall the questions much longer.

It had been thirty minutes now. Fifteen more than usual when he was expected to return. Joyce already had her apology and compromise mapped out in her head but Hopper was nowhere to be seen. Who

knows, maybe he caught someone speeding while he was out and had to take care of it. At least that's what Joyce was telling herself to avoid the thoughts of *'Maybe he isn't coming back this time.'* He always comes back.

Joyce fastened Molly into her high chair and just as she and the kids sat down at the table, a knock at the front door startled her. Finally, a sense of relief flooded into her stomach, carrying away the fear with it. "For the last time Hopper, this is your house. You don't have to kno-" she stopped dead in her tracks as she opened the door to see a totally different face.

"Excuse me, ma'am is this the house of Chief Jim Hopper?" a tall man with piercing dark eyes stood in her doorway, clad in an Indiana State Trooper uniform. Joyce's heart must've quit right then and there because she could no longer breathe.

"Y-yes," she stumbled on her words. "I'm his wife. Is everything okay? Did he do something wrong?" a million scenarios rushed through Joyce's head while she convinced herself to breathe again. State trooper knocking on the Chief's door? That was never good news.

"Mom, who is it?" Joyce could hear Jane yell from the kitchen. "Just a minute sweetheart," she called back before turning to face the trooper again. "I'm sorry, what happened to Hopper?"

"Ma'am, there's been an accident. You'll need to come with us." His words went right over Joyce's head after 'accident'. *'Hopper was in an accident? That's why he wasn't home? Oh God, did I cause this? Is he alright? Is he alive?'* A million thoughts ran through her head at a million miles per hour. She couldn't form the right words to say, she could only stand there with her mouth agape and speechless.

"Ma'am we really need to go." the Trooper tried to motion for her to move but she stood there, her feet stuck to the ground like she was sinking in quicksand. *Why was this happening? What had happened? Was he hit by a drunk driver? Did he swing off the quarry? Was he distracted from the fight?* Just as Joyce was about to follow the Trooper, Jonathan and Will peaked their heads around the corner from the kitchen to see who was at the door.

"Jonathan, watch your siblings. I'll be back in a little while." Joyce called out, fighting back the tears in her eyes as she shut the door behind her.

"What just happened?" Will asked, looking up at his brother. "I don't know but it looks like she was trying to catch the last chopper out of Saigon."

Joyce bit her nails anxiously the entire way to the hospital. The Troopers said they couldn't tell her what happened just yet, which only made her nerves chill colder. All she wanted to know was if he was alive but apparently they couldn't tell her that either. Rain poured down the tinted windows of the police vehicle, each droplet illuminating as they passed the street lights.

She remembered this feeling from before; pure dread as the ambulance had taken Will to the lab the night they burned the vines. She remembered the adrenaline coursing through her veins and the uncertainty in her mind. It was déjà vu at its finest.

It felt like an eternity before they finally arrived at the hospital, and by then a million Troopers couldn't have stopped her from running into the building. It felt like a drama movie. A woman running into a hospital in slow motion, a dreary blue filter on the film, and depressing piano music in the background.

Running through the ER, she saw a group of Troopers crowded by the nurse's station. Powell and Callahan stood up from the waiting room chairs when they saw Joyce arrive. The looks in their eyes made her heart sink lower and lower. There was suddenly no air left in the room and the walls were closing in on her.

"Joyce," Powell started before she interrupted him. "Where is he?"

"Joyce, let's sit down for a mi-"

"Where is he!"

Powell took a deep breath and looked at Callahan. "He's upstairs in

the ICU, but Joyce-

"Take me to see him. Right now," she demanded, tears finally breaking their painful hold and streaming down her face. She couldn't do this, not right now. Now was not the time for everybody to play *'let's get Joyce to calm down'* because it wasn't happening.

He was alive. Sort of. It didn't look like it but the nurses reassured Joyce a hundred times that he was in fact alive. He had brain activity, which apparently is a good sign. She could barely comprehend how she got here, let alone what all the medical jargon was about. He was still unconscious but his heart was beating so that was about as good as it was going to get.

It was hard for her to hold his hand, he looked so bruised and battered and she didn't want to hurt him any more than he already was. The police said that he hit a puddle and the tie rod snapped. She didn't know what that meant either but he hit a puddle and wrapped the blazer around a tree.

The guilt was overwhelming to her. Maybe he wouldn't have been in this situation if she had just agreed about whatever they were arguing about. He would've never went for a drive and he would've never ended up here. They tried to tell her it wasn't her fault but she couldn't bring herself to believe it.

"If you can hear me right now, I'm sorry," she whispered softly under the sound of a beeping monitor. "I'm sorry for being so stubborn, and I'm sorry for being difficult. I've seen the movies and they always say the same things but now I don't know what to say. I'm sorry for the things I've said, today and times before. I'm sorry that this happened to you and I'm sorry for not being the best wife I could be."

"If you can hear me, you need to get through this. You can't leave us behind, Hop. Jonathan, Will, Jane, and Molly love you too much for you to go right now. You've got too many proms and soccer games and field trips left with them. You've got too many game nights and homework assignments left to do with them. You've got too many

Christmases and birthdays left to spend with them. You've got too many heartbreaks to avenge and tears left to dry. If you can't pull through this for me, do it for them."

"If you can hear me, I wish I had said things before that I didn't. I wish I had said *'I love you'* to you in fourth grade when you kissed me on the monkey bars. I wish I had said yes to go to Snow Ball with you. I wish I had said *'drive carefully'* to you on the mornings you left for work. I wish I had a chance to say goodbye when you left for Vietnam. I wish I had said yes to the camping trip you wanted to take last July. I wish I had said yes to every experience I could've spent with you."

"If you can hear me, I need you to know I still cherish every moment I've spent with you. I still laugh when I think about the time you threw me in the pool when I told you not to. I still smile when I think about the fairy lights we wrapped around the trees for our wedding; and how we sat under them at midnight. I still feel my heart pound when I remember the first kiss that we had shared after 20 years apart. I still chuckle when I think about the time we visited the pumpkin patch when we were fifteen and you stepped in a rotten pumpkin. I still cry when I think about the smile on your face when Molly was born. I still feel my heart melt when I remember how you would climb in Molly's crib when she couldn't sleep. I still love every waking moment I've spent by your side."

"If you can hear me, those are just a handful of the reasons why I need you to stay with me; with our kids. I still need you to hold me every night. I still need you to kiss me every morning with your awful morning breath. I still need you to miss the hamper when you throw your clothes on the floor. I still need to accidentally step on your shoes everytime I come in the door. I still need you to smile at me through the window when I'm at work. I still need you to sing Molly to sleep when she misses you at night. I still need you to talk to Will about his D&D campaigns like you understand any of it. I still need you to tell Jonathan how he will be top of his class at NYU. I still need you to pretend-threaten Mike everytime he puts his arm around Jane. I still need you, Hopper. We still need you."

"And if you can hear me, I love you."

Joyce leaned out of her chair and laid her head down on his knee. She wasn't sure how long she had laid there, crying against his body, but she didn't care. She needed him and nothing would ever change that.

Just as Joyce felt her eyes about to close with drowsiness, the body that was lying still under her twitched.

"Joyce?"